

The Conversation Continues...

Judith Nolan



“No matter what they wish for, no matter how far they go, people can never be anything but themselves. That's all.”

Haruki Murakami



Two older men sat quietly on a secluded bench in Central Park, waiting and watching for the sun to rise on a new day. Between them lay the remains of a meal of wine, bread and cheese. A modest celebration repast for two men who deeply understood the simple nature of things. And how much they both had to be thankful for.

Behind them, in the distance, the mouth of a large culvert gave entrance to an unseen world far beneath the city. Neither glanced that way. Once more time was running out, and there was still so much more to say. But, for the moment, neither wished to break the companionable silence.

They faced the breath-taking cityscape beyond the park, sparkling with a myriad of lights and seeming to offer a whole universe of possibilities. It was a beauty that hid

so many things. They both saw and understood different things in the moonlit scene. Each knew the secrets the other man kept close.

There was a deep understanding between them that each did not speak to others of what they knew. The passage of the years had only served to cement this resolve.

“I was almost thirty-seven when we first met, that night, in the park. Remember, it was at that party over at the Tavern for my director, Jean-Jacques Annaud?” Ron Perlman turned to raise his grey eyebrows at his quiet friend. “I can’t believe I’ll soon be sixty-eight, can you?”

“No...” Vincent breathed on a sigh. “For me, that milestone has already passed in January. We have certainly come a very long way together, you and I. But that is for tomorrow. For now, I have plans.”

He lifted his frowning gaze to the lightening sky. “Today is April the 12th, and the anniversary of the night I first met my beloved, not too far from this spot. Once more Catherine will be waiting for me. As she has waited for the last thirty-one years. I have long-since come to accept that all she said would come to pass for us, has actually eventuated. Despite every impossibility.”

He heaved a great sigh. He watched as Ron poured them both a fresh glass of wine and they silently toasted, each the other. The deep appreciation of a very good vintage held them silent for some time.

Finally Ron put down his glass. “It seems like only yesterday, that night we first met. You were my inspiration, you know. You gave me the courage to pursue my dreams. To believe in my own abilities. I watched you stride away into the darkness that night, and I felt an odd kind of kinship. I knew that walking alone at night in Central Park was not for the faint-hearted, but you sure looked like you could handle yourself and then some. I figured, if we ever met again, we’d find we had a lot in common.”

He grinned, strong, white teeth gleaming in the moonlight. “And you surely knew your Shakespeare. You *are* amazing, you know. And you haven’t changed at all, despite the years.” He said the last without rancour.

Ron glanced around at the bushes, then up into the moonlight, before considering his empty left hand. “If you remember, I used to smoke cigars back then. I still miss them.” He laughed, closing his fist.

“I don’t,” Vincent replied honestly. “Catherine used to comment that my clothes smelled of them. I always told her it was only the candle-smoke Below. I’m not sure if she ever believed me.”

“Great catch, my friend!” Ron acknowledged with a laugh, before sobering. “I miss those times, more than I can say. There was a simplicity, then. A whole world before us, just waiting to be discovered. And now...”

“I am always here with you...” Vincent heaved a sigh. “Always...”

“I’m well aware of that fact. Wherever I go, wherever I am, you’re with me. At times I think you’ve even been there before me.”

“Only in my dreams, my friend. I see the world through the eyes of others. It has always been so.” Vincent shrugged as he rose slowly to his feet, staring at the sun slowly breaching the dark outline of the city, clothing everything in a golden beauty.

As he raised the hood of his cloak over his gleaming tawny mane, he turned back to Ron. “April the 13th is your birthday. You know you are more than welcome Below, if you can slip away. We will be there waiting for you, whatever you decide. And the chess set will be out, just in case.”

“Thanks, my friend. You have taught me... much. About life, and about myself.” Ron rose to grasp the other man by his broad shoulder, clasping it strongly. “I might just keep you to that.”

“Any time.” Vincent smiled, tightly clasping the other man’s hand with his own, before both fell away, as he slowly drew back.

“Give Catherine my best.” Ron called after him, as Vincent turned to leave. “I will look forward to seeing her again.”

“I will.” Vincent looked back and nodded. “Until we meet again...”

“I’ll be waiting.” Ron raised one hand, watching his friend disappear into the mouth of the drainage tunnel. He stood looking around at the deserted park, and inhaled deeply. Once more he keenly missed the comfort of a good cigar.

He shook his head on a quiet laugh as he collected the remains of their shared meal, pushing it into a carry bag. He straightened to look around one last time, his thoughtful gaze lingering on the drainage tunnel.

“Life surely is grand,” he commented, to the dawning silence. “Especially when you have good friends you can truly count on.”

He stood for a long time, remembering, before finally turning to walk away into the morning sunshine...



“When we think of the past it's the beautiful things we pick out.

We want to believe it was all like that.”

Margaret Atwood